

Ship-Carpenter's (Robins) House  
Facing south at end of village street,  
Bethel  
Sussex County  
Delaware

HABS No. DEL-151

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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## SHIP-CARPENTER'S (ROBINS) HOUSE

Location: Facing south at end of village street,  
Bethel, Sussex County, Delaware

Present Owner: Robins

Brief Statement  
of Significance: This 18th century house and the  
neighboring Ship-Carpenter's (Dowd)  
House are small frame buildings, typical  
of the period, supposedly built by ship-  
carpenters

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The peaceful little willage of Bethel at the southwest corner of Sussex County has two fine examples of domestic architecture created by ship-carpenters.

Navigable streams, navigation and ship-building played a major role in the early history of Delaware, especially southern Delaware. All the early settlements in southern Delaware were on navigable streams. These streams, with their perennial invitation to trade, naturally called forth a tribe of ship-carpenters. And these ship-carpenters, when not building shallops, turned their hands to other employment and plied their deft carpentry to good purpose in house building.

Two excellent examples of their handiwork are the pair of small eighteenth-century dwellings in Bethel that have always been known as "The Ship-Carpenters' Houses." They stand side by side, facing south, near the end of the village street.

Each consists of a lower one-story-and-attic part joined to a taller two-story-and-attic part at the eastern end. The lower part in each case is the older. The dormers are modern additions. The walls are weatherboarded and there are plain box cornices.

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The chimney tops of both houses are carried out in traditional manner with courses of bricks projecting from the face of the stack and set in such wise as to form neckings and caps.

Tradition, indeed, has been the guide throughout. In the older, lower part of each house, the core of structure has been the "Resurrection Manor plan," with "added" rooms. The later and taller parts of both houses have been treated as additional "added" rooms.

The pine woodwork of the interiors is exceeding simple. There has been no attempt at Georgian paneling or other like amenities. At the fireplace, beside the closed winding stair to the attic, the chimney-breast is covered with vertical pine boarding, each board beaded and neatly fitted to its neighbour.

Prepared by Harold Donaldson Eberlein  
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